DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 771 CS 508 283

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TITLE A "Fair Play" Perspective of Ethics for Intercollegiate Debate.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Joint Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association and the Central States Communication Association (Lexington, KY, April 14-18, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Debate; *Ethics; Higher Education; *Integrity; Judges; Public Speaking; *Speech Communication; Teacher Role; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS *Debate Ethics

ABSTRACT

The philosophy behind competitive debate is to teach students the art of rational discourse with emphasis on correct use of evidence, analysis of argument, logical thinking and persuasive delivery. Although ethics help define the goals of the activity, the extreme competitiveness of intercollegiate debate threatens to undermine the principles of ethical debate. Debaters show regard for ethical concerns when they: (1) are willing to adapt to the audience in each speech situation rather than adapt to the judge in order to win; (2) respect the opposing teams and their position rather than try to make opponents look foolish in order to win; and (3) show responsibility in the use of evidence and reasoning and avoid over-reliance on emotional appeals to cover up a lack of research or sources of evidence. If debaters are to be aware of what falls within the ethical scope of this activity, it is the responsibility of the coaches to make them aware, and it is the responsibility of judges to intercede when ethics are breached. (NH)

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ED 361 771

A "FAIR PLAY" PERSPECTIVE OF ETHICS FOR INTERCOLLEGIATE DEBATE

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"It's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game that counts." This age old adage is descriptive of ethical responsibilities in communicating in the intercollegiate debate arena. The philosophy behind competitive debate is to teach students the art of rational discourse with emphasis on correct use of evidence, analysis of arguments, logical thinking and persuasive delivery. Bartanan and Frank state that,"Ethical standards are crucial to the debate activity. Ethics help define the goals of the activity and identify the kinds of regulations necessary to ensure that competition will be fair." [1] The extreme competitiveness of intercollegiate debate has the potential to produce a "win at all cost" attitude that undermines the principles of ethical debate. The goal of this survey is to examine the current practices in intercollegiate debate and to offer a "fair play" perspective of ethics for debaters.

There are three major areas of ethical concern for debaters. First, the debater must consider the audience to which the arguments will be addressed. In many cases there will be only a judge to hear the debate round, but there are times when other debaters, students, and even parents will be present. The audience should be of high importance in all communicative situations and the debater needs to

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[1]Michael D. Bartanen and David A. Frank,Debating Values (Scottsdale, Arizona: Gorsuch Scarisbrick, Publishers, 1991), p. 187.

adapt to the audience in each different situation. In current competitive debate there tends to be a total disregard for audience other than the judge making the decision (at times even the judge's preferences are ignored). Rather than viewing the activity as an exercise in communication, today's debaters tend to "go for the win" by adapting only to the judge of each round. It is not uncommon to see non-debaters shaking their heads in bewilderment over what they heard and saw while sitting in on a round of debate. Such practices as excessive speed of delivery, loudness, high pitched monotone voice, annoying nonverbal habits, and sloppy style are just a few of the practices that have become commonplace. These characteristics would not be tolerated in any other communicative setting and should not be tolerated in this setting.

A second area of concern for the debater is respect for the opposing team and their position. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," is a Biblical quote that undoubtedly applies to this activity. Unfortunately, many debaters do not take this to heart and will go to great lengths to unnerve, distract, discredit, and confuse their opponents. This is especially true in cross-examination. Debaters think that by throwing the opponent off or making the opponent look foolish that they will have a better chance of winning. Instead of relying on the strength of their arguments, many debaters rely on

intimidation to win rounds.

Third, debaters should be concerned with their own responsibilities in use of evidence and reasoning. Strong lines of reasoning supported by good evidence are the greatest tools the debater has to work with. A debater with great delivery skills but poor evidence and reasoning will not be as successful in the long run as one who is less talented speaking but has great arguments. Current problems in this area include over-reliance on pre-fab briefs, misuse of evidence, lack of research, over use of emotional appeals, and reliance on technicalities (such as topicality and prima facie) to win rounds. These three major areas of concern will be discussed in greater detail, but first a "fair play" perspective of ethics for intercollegiate debate will be presented.

Ethics in communication has been of concern to scholars since the golden age of ancient Greece and Rome. Plato was one of the first to espouse a "moral philosophical" perspective on discourse. In the Phaedrus he described the true rhetorician, or "noble lover," as one who embraced the truth, was self-effacing, and real. The false rhetorician, or "evil lover," was one who was self-serving, showy in appearance, and artificial.[2]

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[2]As discussed in, James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Bergquist, and William E. Coleman, The Rhetoric of Western Thought, 4th ed. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1978) pp.21-25.

Another theorist who metaphorically compares rhetoric to love, or "sex," is Wayne Brockriede. He identifies three stances an arguer can take toward another arguer as love, seduction, and rape. The rhetorical lover, according to Brockriede, is one who views the audience as persons rather than objects or victims. Respect, equality, openness, and a desire to promote free choice in the audience are all characteristics of the "lover." The "seducer" is one who is deceptive, insincere, beguiling and uncaring about the audience. The rhetorical rapist sees the audience as objects, victims to manipulate and violate. Brockriede notes that intercollegiate debate often falls into the category of "rapist."[3] Richard Weaver eloquently summarizes this perspective when he states:

> Finally, we must never lose sight of the order of values as the ultimate sanction of rhetoric. No one can live a life of direction and purpose without some scheme of values. As rhetoric confronts us with choices involving values, the rhetorician is a preacher to us, noble if he tries to direct our passion toward noble ends and base if he uses our passion to confuse and degrade us.[4]

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[3] Wayne Brockriede, "Arguers as Lovers," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 5 (Winter 1972): 1-11;as derived from Richard L. Johannesen, Ethics in Communication, 3rd ed.,(Prospect Heights, IL, 1990)pp. 71-72.

[4] Richard Weaver, "Language is Sermonic," in Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph Eubanks (eds.), Language is Sermonic:Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisianna State University Press, 1970), p. 179

It is a sad state of affairs indeed when this noble educational forum has deteriorated to the extent that it is compared to rhetorical rape! Intercollegiate debate acts as a training ground for real world communication situations and, therefore, should follow the same ethical guidelines as other forums. According to The Ethics of Forensics, "Students should strive to place forensics competition in a proper perspective when ethical decisions are pondered. The goal of winning must be evaluated within a framework of educational values. Forensic contests are not an ends in themselves but means to an end."[5] It is with this ideal in mind that the following "fair play" perspective is offered. In order to uphold the integrity and spirit of intercollegiate debate, debaters should:

1. Acknowledge the unique characteristics of each audience and adapt their messages so as to provide the best possible choice of information for informed decision making.

2. Respect the opposition's character and arguments by upholding a non-hostile atmosphere and a healthy clash environment.

3. Present arguments supported by sound reasoning and evidence in a knowledgeable and non-manipulative manner.

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[5] "The Ethics of Forensics," in American Forensics in Perspective, edited by Donn W, Parson (Annondale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1984).

Many theorist agree that treating the audience as human beings rather than objects is an ethical responsibility of the communicator.[6] Aristotle's Principle of the Golden Mean contends that a balance must be struck between the extremes of complete lack of concern for the audience and saying only what the audience desires to hear. Adapting to the audience is necessary, but only to the extent that the message intent remains intact. Thomas Nilson advocates a "significant choice" perspective toward audience adaptation. He believes that the communicator should provide the best information available in a non-coercive, non-manipulative manner so as to allow the audience to make a voluntary informed choice. Nilson states,"In brief, the speaker must provide for the listener as adequate a grasp of the truth for the situation as is reasonably possible under the circumstances."[7]

The importance of the audience in a communicative situation is undeniable. Why, then, has intercollegiate debate deviated so drastically from this standard? There are those who will argue that audience is not of importance in competitive debate since it is a judged exercise and not an actual public forum. Weaver and Burke

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[6] See, for example, Johannesen, Ethics in Communication, chpts. 3-4. Also, Golden, Bergquist and Coleman, The Rhetoric of Western Thought 4th ed., pp.299-301.

[7] Thomas R. Nilsen's viewpoint is summarized by Johannesen in The Ethics of Rhetoric, 3rd ed., pp.25-28.

say that language is "sermonic," that any intentional use of language has the potential to change people's world views for good or ill.[8] Even though competitive debate is not a public forum, the audience, whether it be one judge or many people, will be potentially influenced by the arguments they hear. It is therefore an ethical burden of the debaters to consider the audience when competing.

There are several current practices in intercollegiate debate that indicate a disregard for audience. The most controversial of these is speed of delivery. The debate world is split into two distinct camps on this issue. Many judges argue that speed is irrelevant as long as the judge can comprehend what is being said. A survey of judges at the 1988 National Debate Tournament indicates that roughly 50% believe speed of delivery to be limited only be comprehensibility.[9] Bartanen and Frank state that speed is "probably not unethical," but more "a matter of style, not ethics."[10] Excessive speed is a tactic many debaters resort to as means of intimidation and clouding of the

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[8] As noted in Johannesen, Ethics in Human Communication, 3rd ed.,pp. 4-5.

[9] Ann Burnett Pettus, "From Attitudinal Inherency to Permutation Standards: A Survey of Judging Philosophies from the 1988 National Debate Tournament," Argumentation and Advocacy: The Journal of the American Forensic Association vol. 27, no. 4, (Spring 1991) p. 167.

[10] Bartanen and Frank, Debating Values, p. 195.

issues. They seek to overwhelm opponents with arguments, allowing for scant coverage of any one argument, in the hope of verbally overpowering them. The audience who is not adapted to the high rate of speed will comprehend little and misunderstand a lot. Many judges justify this practice by saying that they can understand the debaters, so it is o.k. But, this is a blatant denial of any other audience present in the room. Curtis A. Weiss says," Among the most important and most pragmatic aspects of oral communication is intelligibility. In fact, intelligibility has been clinically ranked to be the single most important aspect of speech and language."[11] Excessive speed of delivery is not an acceptable practice in the real world, therefore, it is not an acceptable practice in the preparatory stage of intercollegiate debate. As Don Homuth, a debate coach and judge, states so eloquently,"A sheer mass of words is NOT persuasive. You may think you are cramming a lot of evidence into a short space of time, but let me assure you that you are failing."[12] Austin J. Freeley mentions the existence of a "burden of communication" whereby "effective communication that is well-adapted to the audience and presented with

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[11] Curtis A. Weiss, "Chapter 13: Variables that Influence Speech Intelligibility Most," as quoted by David A. Thomas and Jack Hart, Advanced Debate, 3rd ed., (1987) p. 113

[12] Don Homuth, "Judging Philosophy," The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta, ser. 77, no. 2, (Winter 1992) p. 26. Homuth is an advocate for audience oriented debate.

wit and humor" is expected in debate.[13]

There are a few other areas to consider in avoiding the "rhetorical rape" approach to the audience. The voice pitch and inflection need to be moderated so as to treat the audience with respect. It is common for debaters to reach a high pitched shout in their delivery, especially when rate is accelerated. The result is more compatible with a sale barn auction than an exercise in persuasion. The audience, in this case is not being spoken to as human beings, rather, they are being spoken at as objects. Martin Buber contends that it is an ethical responsibility of the communicator to express themselves in a non-coercive, non-manipulative manner.[14] The shear force of delivery some debaters resort to could be consider coercive by a layperson audience. Annoying non-verbal habits, such as flipping a stress ball around while speaker or sitting or lying down while speaking, and sloppiness may not be of significant ethical importance but could have some bearing on the way in which a message is perceived by the audience.

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[13] Austin J. Freeley, Argumentation and Debate: Critical Thinking for Reasoned Decision Making, 6th ed., (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1986) p.113.

[14] for an overview of Martin Buber's perspective refer to chapter 4 in Johannesen, Ethics in Human Communication, 3rd ed.,pp. 57-77.

The ideal audience oriented debater, then, is one who considers the audience in its entirety and adapts to the unique needs of a given audience. There may be times when one judge is the only audience and "anything goes" for that particular judge. But, when others are present the debater needs to compromise in speed, language, style, etc. to present the best possible choice of arguments for that audience. Attention should be given to clarity in speaking so as to allow the audience to make an educated decision about the issues.

Respect for the opposition is another area of ethical concern to the intercollegiate debater. In any situation where there are opposing viewpoints there needs to be an atmosphere of tolerance for dissent. Karl Wallace outlines four "moralities" or ethical guidelines, one of which refers to the respect for dissent. He believes that communicators should encourage diversity of argument and opinion and seek cooperation and compromise where appropriate.[15] The very structure of intercollegiate debate implies that each position is worthy of being heard and that equal consideration should be given to the opposing arguments. Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. indicates that:

> People should not employ persuasion to block or foreclose persuasive responses on the part of others. Sullen obedience,

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[15] Karl R. Wallace, "An ethical Basis of Communication," The Speech Teacher, 4, (January 1955) pp. 1-9. See also Johannesen, The Ethics of Human Communication, 3rd ed., pp. 21-23. and Golden, Bergquist and Coleman, The Rhetoric of Western Thought 4th ed.,p. 300.

> inarticulate anger, and refusal to continue listening are examples of such blocking tactics. Tactics like these are 'dehumanizing and immoral' because they break the chain of persuasion.[16]

There are a couple of points that need to made on this issue. First, is the practice of rudeness toward the opposing team. In any competitive event there may be a tendency on the part of the participants to act in an objectionable manner. "Grudge matches" against highly competitive teams have the potential to turn into mud flinging contests rather that intellectual debates. Bartanen and Frank agree that "dehumanizing communication behavior" is unethical in debate.[17] A survey of judging philosophies from the 1988 National Debate Tournament conducted by Ann Burnett Pettus found that many judges made specific comments about rude behavior in debate rounds. One judge said, "I am...disturbed by the trend in debate recently towards rudeness in rounds. This consists of snide remarks during cross-ex[amination], condescending questions and answers, laughing and talking loudly during the other team's speaking time." What is surprising is that only 33% of the judges surveyed indicated that

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[16] Henry W. Johnstone, Jr.,"Toward an Ethic for Rhetoric," Communication, 6 (#2, 1981)pp. 305-314. See also Johannesen, The Ethics of Human Communication 3rd ed., pp.49-50.

[17] Bartanen and Frank, Debating Values, p.194.

rudeness was inappropriate in debate.[18] These kinds of techniques are clearly meant to manipulate and intimidate the opponents and must be considered breaches of ethics. The fact that many judges seem to accept and even applaud these practices is unfortunate, for they won't be accepted or applauded in the real world. The current controversy over political mudslinging advertisements is a case in point.

Another factor in showing respect for the opposition is in allowing for diversity of opinion and meaningful clash to occur. Debaters are challenged to invent cases and arguments that are creative and thought provoking. This does NOT mean that debaters should remove themselves from the focus of the resolution. When debaters offer arguments that are not within the legitimate scope of the resolution it places an unfair burden on the opposition to try and defend themselves on unfamiliar ground. As Jack H. Howe states,

" Debaters using "squirrel cases" fail to meet the legitimate expectations of the opponents, judges and audiences and so weaken the entire fabric of intercollegiate debate."[19] The result of this kind of tactic is "two ships passing in the night." No clear picture of the issues emerges in this kind of debate and the audience is left in a

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[18] Ann Burnett Pettus,"From Attitudinal Inherency...," Argumentation and Advocacy, vol. 27, no. 4, p.168.

[19] Jack H. Howe, "It's Time for Open Season on Squirrels!" CEDA Yearbook, (1985) p. 19.

state of confusion and robbed of their ability to make an informed choice. This does not mean that debaters shouldn't have to be prepared for all possible positions on the resolution, even ones they haven't thought of. What it does mean is that cases and arguments that clearly deviate from the resolution at hand can be considered an unethical practice.

Ideally, debaters will conduct themselves in a professional manner by showing respect for the opposition in word and deed. They will meet the challenge of argument directly and with enthusiasm. Competitiveness is only healthy to the extent that it generates the best possible environment for persuasion to occur. This philosophy is best summarized in Parson's The Ethics of Forensics when it states:

> The interactive dimension of forensics suggests that behaviors which belittle, degrade, demean, or otherwise dehumanize others are not in the best interest of forensics because they interfere with the goals of education and personal growth. The ethical forensic competitor recognizes the rights of others and communicates with respect for opponents, colleagues and critics.[20]

The third area of ethical concern for intercollegiate debaters is in the realm of proofs. Aristotle identified three forms of proof that can be utilized in argument. The first proof he termed "ethos" and refers to the credibility of the speaker. The second proof, "pathos,"

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[20] "The Ethics of Forensics," American Forensics in Perspective, ed. Don W. Parsons, p.18.

recognizes emotional appeals as an important element of persuasion. The third proof of "logos" encompasses the use of evidence, reasoning, and analysis on the part of the speaker.[21] Presenting arguments supported by sound reasoning and evidence in a knowledgeable, non-manipulative manner is an ethical responsibility of the debater.

The major problem many intercollegiate debaters have in this area is lack of time to research and become truly knowledgeable on the subject they are debating. Evidence packets are produced by several sources around the country and can be bought for each topic that is to be debated. This isn't so much of a problem if the debaters are willing to use these pre-fabricated briefs as a guide to their own research. Unfortunately, many debaters rely solely on this evidence and never familiarize themselves with the sources of the evidence or other pertinent area not found in the evidence. This kind of practice creates debaters who really don't know what they are talking about. When first hand research goes by the wayside, so to does true understanding of the issues. It is very easy to quote evidence out of context, quote biased sources, misrepresenting the evidence, etc., when you haven't done the research yourself. There is an implied ethical

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[21] for an extended analysis of Aristotle's methodologies see Golden, Bergquist, and Coleman, The Rhetoric of Western Thought, 4th ed., pp.30-52.

contract that Communicators will communicate the truth to the best of their abilities. The audience relies on this "implied contract" when making decisions, therefore, misuse of evidence hinders the ability of the audience to make informed choices. When asked about a piece of evidence, the excuse "I don't know, I didn't cut the evidence myself" is not sufficient to relieve the debater of ethical responsibility for that evidence. The credibility of the debater depends on the credibility of the evidence used, therefore, it should be of prime concern for the debater to be as knowledgeable about the topic and the evidence as possible.[22]

The use of emotional appeals is an area of conflict for rhetorical theorists. Some believe that emotional appeals impede the rational thought process and should not be used.[23] Others believe that emotional appeals are essential to the persuasive process and should therefore be used, but tempered with sound logic and reasoning.[24]

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[22] some sources to look to for use of evidence are, Bartanen and Frank, Debating Values,pp. 61-79. Ronald Lee and Karen King Lee, Arguing Persuasively, (New York & London: Longman, 1989) pp.107-147. Robert James Branham, Debate and Critical Analysis: The Harmony of Conflict, (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991) pp. 69-95.

[23] see Johannesen, The Ethics of Human Communication, 3rd ed., pp. 23-25. for a discussion of the views of Franklyn Haiman and Arthur Kruger.

[24] see references to Aristotle and Cicero in Golden, Bergquist, and Coleman, The Rhetoric of Western Thought, 4th ed.

In intercollegiate debate the use of emotional appeals is not prevalent so not really a big concern in this survey.

Good logic, reasoning, and analysis of arguments is an important responsibility of the debater. Again, knowing the subject well is of utmost importance. Faulty reasoning can lead the audience to draw false conclusions, therefore being of ethical concern. This area requires training as well as knowledge of subject matter and may be more a responsibility of the coach than of the debater. One tactic that may be regarded as suspect is the reliance on technicality arguments (such as topicality, prima facie, hasty generalization, etc.) to win debates rather than a head on clash with the opposing position. These kinds of arguments are an attempt to avoid the real issues of the debate and may confuse the audience. These arguments are legitimate if used for jurisdictional problems, but debaters have recently turned to using these arguments in place of arguing the real issues.

In closing, The debater has a large ethical responsibility in terms of the audience, the opponents, and themselves and need to be aware of what falls within the ethical scope of this activity. It is the responsibility of the coach to make debaters aware of ethics. It is the responsibilty of judges to intercede when ethics are breached. Perhaps this "fair play" perspective of ethics will inspire more debaters to

become "noble lovers" rather than "rhetorical rapists."